

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

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C O N F I D E N T I A L ATHENS 10902

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, GR
SUBJECT: ZIGDIS LAUNCHES HIMSELF

REF: ATHENS 10847

1. JOHN ZIGDIS CONVOKED THE PRESS NOVEMBER 30 AND TOLD IT OF THE DIRECTIONS AND PURPOSES THE UNION OF THE DEMOCRATIC CENTER'S (UDC) NEW LEADERSHIP HAS IN MIND FOR THE PARTY. IN HIS PRESENTATION, ZIGDIS SOUGHT TO CARVE OUT A POSITION FOR THE UDC BETWEEN CARAMANLIS AND PAPANDREOU:

-- HE STATED THAT THE PARTY WOULD BE EXTENSIVELY REORGANIZED, BUT WILL MAINTAIN BOTH ITS TRADITIONS AND ITS COMMITMENT TO DEMOCRATIC SOCIALISM;

-- WHILE AVOIDING ANY DIRECT ATTACK ON THE PRIME MINISTER, HE HIT HIM FOR ALLEGEDLY ALLOWING THE COUNTRY TO MOVE TOWARDS POLARIZATION. HE PROMISED THAT HE WOULD EXERCISE VIGOROUS OPPOSITION TO THE PRIME MINISTER;

-- HE LABELED PASOK A "MARXIST" FORCE AND ACCUSED PAPANDREOU OF BRINGING DIVISION AND DEFEAT TO THE OPPOSITION IN THE ELECTION.

2. ZIGDIS AVOIDED SPECIFICS ON FOREIGN POLICY QUESTIONS, BUT HE
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WAS STRONG IN HIS CRITICISM OF BOTH NATO AND THE US. HE STATED THAT NATO, WHICH HE SUGGESTED WAS BEHIND TURKISH ACTIONS, COULD SOLVE BOTH THE CYPRUS AND AEGEAN PROBLEMS IN 24 HOURS IF IT WANTED TO. HE ASKED RHETORICALLY WHY GREECE SHOULD BELONG TO SUCH AN ORGANIZATION. ON THE UNITED STATES, HE SAID THAT THE GREEK PEOPLE'S FRIENDSHIP FOR THE U.S. HAD BEEN DEEPLY WOUNDED BY THE ACTIONS AND BEHAVIOR OF THE U.S. DURING THE LAST 20 YEARS. HE SAID THE

UDC WOULD DO EVERYTHING TO GET THE U.S. TO UNDERSTAND THE ERRORS OF ITS WAYS. HE ALSO CONFIRMED THE UDC'S SUPPORT FOR GREEK MEMBERSHIP IN THE EC, BUT IMPLIED THAT THE PARTY WOULD INSIST THAT ENTRY BE ON EQUITABLE TERMS FOR GREECE.

3. COMMENT: ZIGDIS' PRESENTATION WAS MORE PARTISAN AND MORE AGGRESSIVE THAN SIMILAR PAST EXERCISES BY HIS PREDECESSOR GEORGE MAVROS. AT THE SAME TIME HE SEEMED TO BE TRYING TO AVOID HEATING THE POLITICAL ATMOSPHERE.

4. THE BITTERNESS OF ZIGDIS' OPPONENTS IN THE BATTLE FOR THE UDC SUCCESSION SEEMS TO HAVE KEPT SEVERAL OF THEM AWAY FROM HIS PRESS CONFERENCE: JOHN PESMAZOGLOU, ATHANASSIOS KANELLOPOULOS, AND FIVE OTHER UDC DEPUTIES WERE NOT PRESENT IN WHAT SEEMS TO BE A NONE TOO SUBTLE DISPLAY OF PIQUE. MOREOVER, WE UNDERSTAND THAT THE FORCES SUPPORTING JOHN PESMAZOGLOU ARE NOW REGROUPING IN ANTICIPATION OF THE SCHEDULED JANUARY PARTY CONGRESS. THE CONTINUING SQUABBLING WITHIN THE UDC IS, OF COURSE, HARDLY AN AUSPICIOUS BEGINNING FOR ZIGDIS AS HE ATTEMPTS TO RESURRECT THE PARTY.
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